

HANDING ON THE FAITH

**FORMING
RCIA
SPONSORS**



LEADER'S GUIDE

PLEASE NOTE: This leader's guide was originally written for those using this video program in its VHS format. Those now using this program on DVD may find some references that do not apply to their use (i.e., directions for locating segments, time notations, etc.). We trust that both VHS- and DVD-users will find this guide a valuable resource.



This program is a video companion to the booklet *Handing on the*

Faith: When You Are an RCIA Sponsor (B4492) by Rita Burns Senseman. Both are produced by St. Anthony Messenger Press and can be ordered by calling 1-800-488-0488.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Catholic Update Video

The Use of Video in Faith Formation 4

Introduction to the Series 6

HANDING ON THE FAITH FORMING RCIA SPONSORS

Overview of the Program 9

Audience 11

Small Group Process 11

Story Segment

Summary 13

Suggestions for Use 14

Questions for Sharing 14

Witness Segment

Summary 15

Suggestions for Use 16

Questions for Sharing 17

Teaching Segment

Summary 17

Suggestions for Use 19

Questions for Sharing 19

Musical Reflection Segment

Summary 20

Suggestions for Use 22

Resources for Further Study

Scripture 22

Catechism of the Catholic Church 23

St. Anthony Messenger Press 23

CATHOLIC UPDATE VIDEO

The Use of Video in Faith Formation

Jesus used the “media” of his day to teach. He was a master storyteller. His preaching is full of imagery. His parables are calculated to engage his audience. Through the ages, Christian teachers and preachers have followed Jesus in the creative proclamation of his message.

From the culture of Jesus’ time, heavily dependent on *oral communication*—to the advent of *print communication*—to our own time and its dependence on *electronic media*—Christian teachers have adapted their proclamation to each new medium and its particular demands.

Media scholars like Marshall McLuhan remind us of the impact of the medium on the message it carries. *How* we communicate affects *what* we communicate. Electronic media offer us new ways to tell the story of our faith. Father Pierre Babin points out (see *The New Era in Religious Communications*, Pierre Babin with Mercedes Iannone, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991) that the message, as well as the sender and receiver, all will be re-shaped in the telling.

Catechesis, as a part of the total evangelization process, must touch the learners’ hearts and shine the light of faith on their lives. It must connect to the learners’ experience or risk being discarded as irrelevant. To be effective, catechists must learn how to make the best use of the electronic media available in our culture, aware of the particular medium’s strengths and weaknesses.

Video is a very popular, familiar and accessible part of our electronic culture. It draws us in, captures our imaginations and touches us on a deep, emotional level.

As it speaks to our experience and utilizes several of our senses, its message is more likely to be heard and remembered. By integrating quality video programs into the catechetical process, catechists can share the message more effectively.

At the same time, as television becomes a more pervasive part of our lives, we can be lulled into thinking that it can do everything for us—inform, entertain, shop, even worship. The reality is that it can't and shouldn't do everything. As Pierre Babin emphasizes, electronic media function differently than print media. They appeal first to the *emotional* content of our faith rather than the *intellectual* content. Video cannot begin to convey the amount of information print can. It cannot replace the live presence and personal witness of the catechist. But in a catechetical setting, it can be a powerful part of the “mix of media” used in proclaiming the message.

How effectively video—or any electronic media—is used in the catechetical setting depends primarily on how prepared the catechist is to use it:

- A preview of the video is essential to determine the best use of the program with a particular group.
- The catechist should select a video program (or section of a video) based on the audience, the purpose, and the availability of competent teachers and other resources and activities to support the theme.
- Sufficient time should be available to introduce the video and to process the viewing experience.

Catechists must realize that they control the use of video in their sessions. They might approach a video program in one of two ways: as a skeleton on which to build a presentation or as a way to “enflesh” an existing skeleton.

A video program well-tailored to the needs of a group might be used in its entirety. At other times, catechists may creatively manipulate the video to fit their needs:

- An excerpt may be taken from a longer piece to illustrate a point.
- A video may be shown with the *sound off* to highlight an aspect of the program.
- The “pause” button can be used freely to interject explanations and examples or to elicit reactions.
- The program or excerpt may be repeated to emphasize a point.

The producers of this video program have attempted to craft both medium and message with an awareness of the power of the medium as well as its limitations. They encourage those who use it to study this guide and become familiar with ways to allow this program to supplement their own sharing of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Series

Catholic Update Video is a video resource designed for use in the RCIA, catechist formation, sacrament programs for parents, faith-sharing groups, study groups, ministry training and high school religious education. *Catholic Update Video* draws from Catholic life and practice to present a single topic in a “video toolbox” format with four distinct segments—story, witness, teaching and musical reflection.

Catholic Update Video has been designed with today’s learner in mind. Its segments are short and can stand alone or be used with others in the program. The format is flexible, making it useful in a variety of group settings as well as for individual viewing. The emphasis is on what video can do best, namely touch us through

story (story segment), testimony (witness segment) and song (musical reflection segment) with images and the emotions they carry. But a more “didactic” approach (teaching segment) respects the need to convey a concise core of information.

The general model for catechetical process (life experience, message or doctrine, response) is respected by the order of the four segments, although at times a catechist may choose to use them alone or out of sequence:

- Each program begins with a **story segment** designed to draw viewers in and help them connect their life-experience to the faith-topic.
- The testimony of real-life Catholics in the **witness segment** helps viewers reflect on their own life experience and prepare for group sharing.
- Our teacher briefly highlights some aspects of the topic in the **teaching segment**. Relevant images help to illustrate the points being made. (*This segment is not intended to treat a topic exhaustively nor substitute for a more thorough presentation on the message or doctrine.*)
- Viewers are invited to respond in prayer using the *musical reflection segment*.

The program’s host provides a context for each segment. This is designed to help viewers who will see the program from beginning to end. Catechists who use segments individually or out of sequence may wish to prepare their own lead-in. On-screen graphics provide viewers with a question for reflection or sharing between segments.

This leader’s guide is an important tool for making the best use of this video program.

It includes the following features.

- **Small Group Process** incorporating all four segments in a single session.
- **Summary and Suggestions for Use** for each segment.

- **Questions for Sharing** for the story, witness and teaching segments; facilitators can choose from them or use them as models for developing their own questions.
- **Suggestions for Use** for the musical reflection segment provide suggestions for using this segment in a prayer setting.
- **Resources for Further Study** are listed at the end of this guide.
- Approximate times are noted for where each segment begins. *(If the VCR is equipped with an “elapsed time” counter, reset the counter to 0:00:00 at the beginning of the tape and fast-forward to the time listed for the beginning of the desired segment. If the VCR does not have an “elapsed time” counter, the facilitator can fast-forward in the “review” mode [i.e., while the VCR is in “play”] to find the gray screen and Catholic Update Video logo that indicate the start of a segment.)*

HANDING ON THE FAITH
FORMING RCIA SPONSORS

Overview of the Program

Being an RCIA sponsor might be compared to the role of a guide on a walking tour of a historically significant city. Such guides tend to have a passion for “their” city and enjoy sharing its stories, interesting characters and secrets with others.

Those watching this *Catholic Update Video* have been chosen to be guides as well. They’ve been called to a very important ministry—sponsoring someone seeking to become a full member of the Catholic Church, someone participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, commonly called the “RCIA.”

As sponsors, they’ll accompany others on a journey of faith. The candidates they sponsor may be seeking Baptism, may already be baptized in another Christian tradition, or may be baptized Catholics who have not been formed or confirmed in the Catholic faith.

In each case, the journey will be unique. They’ll hear personal histories of those they are sponsoring, and—like a guide on a walking tour—they’ll share stories as well: stories of Jesus and the Church, and their own stories of faith. The walk they’ll take together will lead both them and those they sponsor to deeper relationships with our loving God. Their candidates may celebrate this deepening relationship in one or all of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, usually at the Easter Vigil.

The work of those serving as parish sponsors usually begins during the first period of the RCIA process, a time of initial inquiry. It continues through the period we call the “catechumenate,” a time of prayer, learning and sharing faith. The official role of parish sponsor

ends with the beginning of Lent.

At some point during the process, the candidate for Baptism chooses a godparent. A godparent and a parish sponsor are two different ministries. The godparent might be from outside the parish. He or she is ideally someone who has been and will continue to be a Christian model and support for the candidate through life. It's the role of the godparent to present the candidate at the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent and to accompany the candidate through the final, intense preparation for initiation. The godparent will also stand up with the candidate at the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and help with continuing Christian formation after Easter.

While some parish sponsors may be asked to serve as godparents for their candidates, or Confirmation sponsors if their candidates are already baptized, all who undertake the ministry of parish sponsor can continue to offer prayer and support throughout the initiation process, during the sacramental celebrations, and beyond.

The role of parish sponsor is very important. As guide, companion, representative of the community and witness, they're part of an important and ancient tradition of bringing to the Church those who are seeking Christ.

This *Catholic Update Video* has four segments designed to help parish sponsors understand and embrace their role:

- *Story*: The program begins with a brief story drawn from the beginnings of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read about one of the first sponsor-candidate relationships: A man named Ananias is chosen by the risen Jesus to accompany a special candidate as he takes his first steps on the Christian way.

- *Witness*: We've asked some folks who've taken this walk—candidates and sponsors—to share a bit of their journey.
- *Teaching*: Rita Burns Senseman, an experienced leader in the RCIA, is our teacher for this program. She's written a print resource for RCIA sponsors, which contains more information and suggestions than we have time for in this video. Her remarks here give a concise overview of a sponsor's role.
- *Music Video*: Our program concludes with a music-and-image reflection, a prayer written especially for sponsors.

Audience

This program is intended for an adult audience. Its primary audience is parish sponsors of those in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The program has a general focus—on the relationship of sponsor and candidate and not on the rites. It may also be used in the formation of sponsors of adults seeking full communion with the Catholic Church as well as sponsors of adult Catholics seeking Confirmation.

Small Group Process

While many groups may choose to use the segments in separate sessions or out of sequence, we provide here a sample outline for a small group process incorporating all four of the video segments into a single session. This outline is designed to help volunteer catechists/facilitators who may need assistance in planning group sessions and for those professionals who like to adapt a sample plan to meet their own needs.

Suggested Process

1. Setting the Environment

An analogy used within this video is that of a sponsor being a guide and companion on a journey. A central table may be set with items that are useful for physical journeys (e.g., compass, maps, tourbooks, walking stick) and for the spiritual journey to initiation (e.g., Bible, prayer book, catechism, candle, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*).

2. Gathering

Invite participants to gather around the table for an opening prayer or song. Choose a song familiar to the participants on the theme of the journey of faith or community. Use the following or similar opening prayer: *Loving God, we gather today as men and women who desire to share our faith with others who seek to know you better. We pray for your guidance as we offer direction and support to those we sponsor. As we embark on this journey together, help us all to grow in love for you and your Church. Amen.*

3. Sharing My Story

- Invite personal reflection and group sharing on the question “When has another person guided me on my own journey of faith?”
- View the *story segment* and invite participants to name the ways Ananias was a companion to Saul/Paul on his journey of faith. Invite reflection and sharing on the ways Ananias may have grown through this experience.
- View the *witness segment* and invite participants to share about their own expectations and experiences of the relationship between sponsors and candidates.

4. *Relating My Story to the Church's Story*

Show *teaching segment* and discuss the roles and qualities of sponsors. Use discussion questions on page 19.

5. *Responding in Life and Faith*

Use the *musical reflection segment* as a closing prayer. (If time permits, consider using or modifying the sample prayer experience outlined on page 22 of this guide.)

Story Segment “Ananias and Saul”

(Begins approximately 5:30 into program.)

Summary

The story segment retells a brief but significant story drawn from the beginnings of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:10-19 and 22:12-16), we read about one of the first sponsor-candidate relationships: a man named Ananias, chosen by the risen Jesus to accompany a very special candidate taking his first steps on the Christian way.

Ananias, a member of what people called “the Way,” those early followers of Jesus, recounts his story of accompanying Saul through his conversion experience.

Ananias shares his experience of receiving a vision of Jesus sending him to find Saul, an enemy of those who followed “the Way.” Ananias was frightened but knew he had to respond to what the Lord was asking of him. Despite his fear, he followed the Lord’s instructions, found Saul, greeted him as a brother, and laid hands on him to restore his sight.

Ananias realized that his mission didn’t end there. Their visions of Jesus had brought them to each other, and Ananias became a companion to Saul in the days

that followed. He helped Saul sort through his life and conversion and begin to embrace his new mission. They shared how Jesus had spoken to each of their hearts, what Jesus meant to each of them and how God's plan had unfolded in the history of Israel and was at work even in them, at that moment. Ananias also had the opportunity to testify to Saul's conversion and sincerity to the Damascus community of "the Way."

Ananias asks us to remember that it can become the task of any follower of Jesus to open a door, walk in and embrace another in the name of Christ. He affirms that we're all called to accompany each other on the way of faith, to learn where our journeys have brought us and where they will lead us. Sometimes, we're lucky enough to be asked to stand up on another's behalf in the midst of the community. Together we listen for the voice of Christ; we seek to discern how he is calling us. There, wonderful things can happen, as God works in and through us all.

Suggestions for Use

Use this segment to invite participants to reflect and share about the experience of walking with others along the journey of faith. Encourage them to first consider their own experiences of having another serve as their guide or companion on the way. Follow this with reflection and sharing about how they are guides or companions for others. The following or similar questions may help viewers reflect and share.

Questions for Sharing

1. When has another person guided you on your own journey of faith?

2. Name the ways Ananias was a companion to Saul/Paul on his journey of faith.
3. What are some of the ways that Ananias may have grown through this experience?
4. What do you imagine that Saul was feeling and experiencing throughout this story? How might your candidates' feelings be similar?
5. When have you been a companion to another on their journey of faith? What did you gain from the experience?

Witness Segment

(Begins approximately 12:30 into program.)

Summary

The relationship between parish sponsor and candidate can be meaningful for both. We've asked some sponsors and candidates who've taken this walk to share about their personal experiences of these roles and relationships.

Some of the main points shared by sponsors and candidates are outlined below.

- Being a sponsor is mostly about being a friend. I share how God has touched my heart.
- When I was asked to be a sponsor I thought I would need to be a source of knowledge about the Church and its traditions, but I found that took care of itself. We became good friends.
- I will always be there to support her in her faith. I will always help her grow. When she feels that she is slipping or has doubts, I will be there to help her.

- Seeing my candidate's conversion added to my own conversion and love of the Lord.
- My sponsor served as a friend, a resource and someone who answered questions that I was embarrassed to ask in the group.
- My sponsor was someone to call if I had a question, but I didn't take advantage of him as much as I should have.
- My sponsor is an active member of the Church and a very loving and supportive person.
- My sponsor was not only emotionally supportive but she also encouraged me to attend on a regular basis.
- It was a really powerful thing to have my sponsor and the community standing behind me and supporting me as I moved on in my journey.
- My sponsor was there for me when I had questions and was good at getting answers for me.
- My sponsor has been a member of the parish for a while. This gave me the background of the parish as well as the Catholic faith.
- My sponsor was just someone trying to take the next step in his own journey by assisting someone else in theirs.

Suggestions for Use

Use this segment to invite reflection and sharing about the expectations participants have for the relationship between sponsor and candidate. Focus here on the feelings and relationship. *(The teaching segment addresses the role and qualities of sponsors and offers practical suggestions for fulfilling that role.)* Encourage participants to reflect on their own feelings and expectations as well as possible feelings and expectations of those they will sponsor. The following

or similar questions may help viewers reflect and share.

Questions for Sharing

1. What do you expect of the relationship between sponsor and candidate?
2. What feelings do you have as you prepare for your ministry as parish sponsor?
3. What hopes do you have for yourself and your candidate?
4. What is the most important thing you want to give to your candidate? What other things might he or she need from you?
5. What concerns do you have about your ability to be a good sponsor?

Teaching Segment

(Begins approximately 16:30 into program.)

Summary

Rita Burns Senseman has been involved in initiation ministry for many years. She is a team member for the North American Forum on the Catechumenate and author of several books on Christian initiation. She shares some key points about the role of parish sponsor from her booklet "Handing on the Faith: When You Are an RCIA Sponsor."

Our teacher, Rita Burns Senseman compares the role of parish sponsor in the RCIA to being a guide on a hike. A guide is familiar with the path and can point out the scenic overlooks. A guide also helps when the going gets tough—lending a hand or helping with footing, offering encouragement along the way. A guide

has traveled the path before and can be trusted to lead the way, even when something new or challenging arises along the trail.

As a companion on a hike, guiding another, one is not necessarily supposed to know it all. What's important is that the guide shares his or her own insights and personal experiences of hiking.

There are others on this path too. Not everyone travels at the same pace; each hiker brings his own unique knowledge and experience. But all travel together—learning from, supporting and encouraging each other along the way.

Parish sponsors won't need hiking boots for their ministry in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, but they will be guiding others along the path to initiation in the Catholic Church.

Some of the roles and responsibilities of a parish sponsor are:

- a *companion* who walks with another on a journey to a deeper relationship with God, a journey that takes place within the Christian community.
- a *guide* who is familiar with what it means to be Catholic and who can point out what's important and help the candidate if the going gets tough.
- a *representative* of the larger Church community, the candidate's personal connection to the local and universal Catholic Church.
- a *witness* who will indicate to the parish that the candidate is sincerely searching for God and longing for a deeper relationship with Christ in the Church.

Some qualities that make a good sponsor are:

- A sponsor is willing to share faith.
- A sponsor is prayerful.
- A sponsor is welcoming and hospitable.
- A sponsor is a good and active listener.
- A sponsor is empathetic and compassionate.
- A sponsor is informed.
- A sponsor is willing to challenge.
- A sponsor is a person of mission.

Rita concludes by encouraging parish sponsors to enjoy the journey. Involvement as a sponsor often helps deepen and renew one's own relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church.

Suggestions for Use

Specific expectations and responsibilities of parish sponsors vary from parish to parish. Rita shares general roles and qualities that apply to all parish sponsors. It will be important to clearly communicate your parish's expectations of sponsors as well as form them for their ministry.

This segment will be useful in introducing parish sponsors to their ministry. Use the segment to give them an overview of the role of sponsor and then spell out specific ways to fulfill that role in your parish setting. The following or similar questions may help viewers reflect and share.

Questions for Sharing

1. What qualities do you bring to the ministry of parish sponsor?
2. What personal experiences can you draw on to help another along the path of faith?

3. What ideas do you have of things to do with and for your candidate to help him or her grow in relationship with Christ in the Church?
4. How will you incorporate prayer in your relationship with your candidate?
5. How willing are you to share your own faith journey with your candidate? What have been the significant highs and lows of your journey?
6. When your candidate comes to you with questions you can't answer, how do you anticipate handling this?

Musical Reflection Segment

(Begins approximately 24:00 into program.)

Summary

The program concludes with a prayer accompanied by words and images, invoking God's help for sponsors so that they each may be God's instrument, assisting another on the journey of faith.

The text of the prayer is included here. Those using this video may reprint the prayer to distribute to parish sponsors. *(Please include copyright information.)*

A Prayer for Parish RCIA Sponsors

Dear Lord,

Thank you for helping me accept the invitation to become a sponsor. It is both an awesome opportunity and responsibility. Make me worthy of this ministry, for—through it—my candidate may come to know you within your Church.

Thank you for my brothers and sisters in Christ who walk this road with my candidate and me.

Help me to be willing to share my faith and to demonstrate my faith in word and action.

Help me to be prayerful. Let my prayer life be visible and open for my candidate to see. For it is often through prayer that you speak to us.

Help me to be welcoming and hospitable. Let me not forget what it is like to be alone or afraid.

Help me to walk beside my candidate, both listening and sharing experiences along the way.

Help me to be open and attentive to the needs of my candidate. Give me guidance to know when to slow down, encourage or just be present. Give me the wisdom and courage to lovingly challenge my candidate when needed.

May this shared journey strengthen and renew not only my candidate's commitment to you but also my own.

May it bring us both closer to you and to the community of believers with whom we share this walk of faith.

Amen.

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Suggestions for Use

This segment may be used on its own as a prayer or as part of a longer prayer experience. An outline of a sample prayer service follows.

1. Open the prayer with the following or similar words, *“Loving God, you call us here to prepare to serve you and your Church as parish sponsors. As we take on the role of guide for others, we realize our own need for guidance from your Holy Spirit. Help us to be good representatives of our faith community — sharing your love and faithfulness in our actions toward our candidates. May our efforts help our candidates develop a closer relationship with you, this parish community and the Catholic faith.”*
2. Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20 or Colossians 3:12-17
3. Invite the sponsors to reflect on their baptismal call to share the good news of God’s love with others. Invite each to share the one thing he or she most needs in order to serve well as a parish sponsor.
4. Introduce the music video with the following or similar words, *“We trust that God will give us what we need to serve well in this ministry as sponsors. Let’s raise up all of our needs and the needs of our candidates as we join in this music video prayer.”* View the *music video segment*.
5. Close by joining hands and praying the “Our Father” and then offering each other a sign of peace.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- 1) **Scripture references:** Acts 9:10-19, 22:12-16

2) *Catechism of the Catholic Church* references:

Sacraments of Initiation (1212-1419) with particular focus on Baptism (1213-1284)

3) Available from St. Anthony Messenger Press

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